The Melville Society NEWSLETTER

SUMMER, 1957

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For the tenth annual meeting of the Society in Madison, Merton M. Sealts and Harrison Hayford have agreed to discuss informally some of the problems which they have encountered while editing Melville's works from manuscript or from earlier printed versions. This is a matter of considerable interest to Melville scholars and should provide the basis for a lively discussion following the two talks. President Howard Horsford hopes that the entire program, including a business meeting, can be held within the limits of an hour or an hour and a half at most.

A nominating committee consisting of Luther Mansfield (chairman), Nathalia Wright, and William Braswell will present the names of candidates for offices which are to be filled at the meeting. Those to be elected are (1) a member of the executive committee for a five-year term and (2) a secretary (who also serves as editor of the *Newsletter)* for a three-year term.

As previously announced, the meeting will be held at 10:45 A. M. on Tuesday, September 10, in the Loft Room of the Memorial Union building at the University of Wisconsin.

QUEEQUEG'S MARK

In several recent conversations among Melville enthusiasts and scholars the question of Queequeg's mark has been raised. As everyone remembers, Queequeg was unable to sign his name when joining the crew of the *Pequod* (Chapter XVIII) and instead merely made his mark. But this mark was not an X. According to Melville, what Queequeg recorded on the crew list was "an exact counterpart of a queer round figure which was tattooed upon his arm."

What was this "queer round figure," and what, if anything, may it symbolize? Artists have occasionally tried their hands at imagining what the mark may have been. In most editions of *Moby-Dick*, however, it appears only as a simple cross.

Can any member provide further information on the subject?

QUERY

A reader asks for help in locating the passage in *Moby-Dick* in which Captain Ahab is described as possessing a "steel skull." If any member can identify the passage, he is invited to notify the secretary.

MELVILLE FIRST EDITIONS

What should one pay for a first edition of one of Melville's books? Advice on this matter has been sought from the secretary upon several occasions, and in purchasing items for his own collection he has had to give considerable attention to the prices asked by the various dealers. He has made for his own use a kind of standard price list to serve him as a guide. The prices recorded are those actually found in book dealers' catalogues and in the book stores themselves. In general, the secretary has discovered that prices higher than those on this list are *too high* and that satisfactory copies of the books can be obtained for the standard prices if the buyer is willing to make a search or to wait.

What may prove a satisfactory copy of a book for one person may, of course, not satisfy someone else. The prices quoted apply to clean, complete first editions in very good condition. Unusually fine copies or those with association value may cost somewhat more. On the other hand, the secretary believes that Melville scholars have been paying more than is really necessary to secure first editions of Melville's books. This can be remedied, he thinks, by publishing a standard price list.

Incidentally, this is not a theoretical list but one which represents actual prices paid for Melville first editions within the past five years. The secretary can almost guarantee that highly satisfactory copies of the books can be obtained without much trouble today. He constantly receives dealers' catalogues in which these items are listed. Having set out to develop a collection which will contain not only all the first editions but all subsequent editions and all variants as well, he has had the thrilling experience of purchasing many of the items.

While the list below deals only with first editions of works by Melville, the secretary also can supply standard prices for later editions and for books about Melville or books which Melville used.

Battle-Pieces (1866), $15-20
Confidence-Man (1857), $15
Israel Potter (1855), $5-10
Mardi, 2 vols. (1849), $20
Moby-Dick (1851), $150-250
Omoo (1847), $15
Piazza Tales (1856), $10-20
Pierre (1852), $15-20
Redburn (1849), $20-25
Typee, 2 vols. (1846), $150
Typee (N. Y., 1846), $50
Typee (London, 1846), $15
White-Jacket (1850), $20
Whale, 3 vols. (London, 1851), $250
Works, 16 vols. (London, 1922-24), $75

It should be noted that, except where another place of publication is mentioned, the first editions named are all American editions. Such elusive items as *Clarel*, no purchasable copy of which has come to

the secretary's attention for at least ten years, are not included. Finding them will be largely a matter of good luck, and the reader must bargain for himself.

MELVILLE POSTAGE STAMP

Several members have been interested in persuading the U. S. Post Office Department to issue a Melville commemorative postage stamp. Such a request was presented through Congressman John W. Heselton of Massachusetts earlier this year. Postmaster General Arthur E. Summerfield replied to the request as follows:

"Thank you for your letter of May 21 relating further to the request for a special stamp to honor Herman Melville, American Author.

"We are sorry that it was not possible to include the proposed stamp in our program this year. You may be assured, however, that the request for a stamp for Mr. Melville will be retained in our files for such consideration as it may be possible to give it in the future.

"In this connection, we wish to mention that stamps honoring an individual are generally issued on some significant anniversary in his life and as a part of a ceremony instituted by some local or national organization apart from the Post Office Department."

Can any member suggest a suitable anniversary for which the Society might plan a celebration? Incidentally, Robert G. Newman, librarian of the Berkshire Athenaeum, has been especially active in attempts to secure a commemorative stamp.

EXPLICATION

The following explication has been offered regarding the term *inside narrative* in the subtitle of *Billy Budd:*

No mystery about "an inside narrative" —H. M. is saying, this is no yarn, no salty tale, no "mere" external narrative, but "the *inside* story" of what *really* happened. Of course, the *really* is the Budd that blooms a variety of flowers. Note how little of the *outside* sea is present in *Billy Budd* (symbolically or otherwise) —unlike *Moby-Dick* or *Benito Cereno.*

—Sidney Kaplan

NOTES

The Sagamore Press (50 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City 20) has published Melville's *Israel Potter* under the title *His Fifty Years of Exile* in its American Century series. This is a paperback series of American literary classics of the past hundred years. Melville's book is one of the first fourteen works chosen to be published in the series. Price: $1.25.

"Bartleby" has been surprisingly popular as a radio play. It was presented (for the third or fourth time?) on June 6 on the Theatre Royal program of the Mutual Broadcasting System.

John Satterfield, assistant professor of music at Davidson College, is hoping to make a study of form in *Moby-Dick.*

Merton M. Sealts reports that his *Melville as Lecturer* may be ready this year, possibly in November. Look for his "The Ghost of Major Melvill" in a forthcoming issue of the *New England Quarterly.*

Further word is expected soon regarding the still-unpublished volumes of the Hendricks House edition of Melville's complete works. Serious questions have been raised over the feasibility of continuing the project. The series, originally scheduled and promised for completion about 1950, has been delayed again and again. Only a few of the volumes have actually appeared. Some editors of individual volumes in the series have been reported ready to negotiate with other publishers. The first volume, *Collected Poems,* was published exactly ten years ago.

Professor H. Howard Hughes of Texas Wesleyan College is visiting this summer, with Mrs. Hughes, many of the places in South America (notably Rio de Janeiro) which were known to Melville and which are mentioned in his works.

Howard P. Vincent, who returns to the United States this autumn after a long period of service with the U. S. Information Service in France, reports a definitely growing interest in Melville in the latter country.

Dr. James Kirsch, a Los Angeles analytical psychologist, gave an interesting lecture on Melville's experience of Self, as revealed in *Moby-Dick* and elsewhere, at a meeting of the Analytical Psychology Club of Southern California this spring. Plans for publication of the lecture are now being made. Dr. Kirsch kindly reports the publication of "The Stone Image of Melville's *Pierre,*" by Saburo Yamaya, in a forthcoming issue of the Japanese periodical, *Studies in English Literature.*

Stuart C. Sherman sends the welcome news that the bibliography committee has completed all work except final checking on a Melville bibliography for the years 1952 through 1956. Publication has not yet been arranged. The secretary wishes to report that he has had the pleasure of seeing a copy of the work in its nearly complete form. The committee is to be complimented upon its faithfulness in carrying on this worthy project in the face of numerous difficulties. The bibliography should prove of significant help to Melville scholars.

THE *Melville Society* NEWSLETTER IS PUBLISHED QUARTERLY FOR MEMBERS OF THE Melville Society, a group of literary scholars and others interested in the life and works of Herman Melville. The Society seeks to facilitate the exchange of information among its members, to stimulate the study of Melville's life and works, and to encourage literary, historical, and bibliographical research. Membership is two dollars per year and includes all services of the Society. Associate membership (non-voting) is one dollar per year and includes all issues of the Newsletter. Address Tyrus Hillway, secretary, at Colorado State College, Greeley, Colorado.